CONFERENCE OF THE EIGHTEEN-NATION COMMITTEE ON DISARMAMENT

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Working Paper concerning the Report of the Secretary-General of 1 July 1969 on Chemical and Bacteriological (Biological) Weapons and the Effects of Their Possible Use (A/7575)

I. The problem of the prohibition and total elimination of weapons of mass destruction is one of the urgent tasks facing the international community.

In the field of nuclear weapons certain steps have already been taken, to mention the 1963 Moscow Partial Test Ban Treaty, the 1967 Convention concerning peaceful utilization of the outer space and the 1968 Treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons.

These steps have significantly contributed to the slowing down of the nuclear arms race and the creation of conditions favouring other measures that may lead to further reduction, and ultimately total elimination of nuclear weapons.

II. Weapons of mass destruction are a class of weapons that includes also agents of chemical and bacteriological (biological) warfare. The danger inherent in these weapons has been particularly strongly exposed in the report of the Secretary-General on chemical and bacteriological (biological) weapons and the effects of their possible use (A/7575). The danger derives among others from the fact that these weapons can be manufactured relatively cheaper and easier than is the case with nuclear weapons. Thus, any country not necessarily technologically advanced or industrially developed could manufacture or acquire a capability in this type of warfare.

Chemical and bacteriological (biological) weapons are weapons of mass destruction that pose a threat to the whole of mankind. Their use has been declared a crime against humanity and a violation of the generally recognized principles of international law as well as the UN Charter.

One of the principal goals of the international community in the field of disarmament should therefore be an effort aimed at ensuring that the prohibition of use of chemical and bacteriological (biological) weapons is strictly and universally

observed as well as efforts designed to accomplish their total elimination, particularly through a prohibition of development, prohibition of manufacture and a prohibition of their stockpiling.

III. General Assembly resolution 2454 A(XXIII) of 20 December 1968 requested the Secretary-General to prepare, with the assistance of qualified consultant-experts, a report on chemical and bacteriological (biological) weapons and the effects of their possible use. The resulting report (A/7575), issued on 1 July 1969, is of great significance for the strengthening of effectiveness of the Geneva Protocol of 1925 and offers a considerable encouragement to further search for ways and means of total elimination of these weapons.

Prepared by highly competent consultant-experts, the report emphasizes the significance of the Geneva Protocol which, as they indicate, helped establish "a custom and hence a standard of international law". It also unequivocally places chemical and bacteriological (biological) weapons in a class of weapons of mass destruction underlining the high urgency of taking further steps that would ultimately lead to their complete elimination from military arsenals.

IV. Poland considers, therefore, that the report of the Secretary-General on chemical and bacteriological (biological) weapons and the effects of their possible use can serve as a suitable basis for further deliberations in this Committee concerning these weapons.

To our mind the starting point in this regard should be to work to strengthen the existing international juridical norms banning the use of these weapons in warfare and which, as we know, are contained in the Geneva Protocol of 1925. Bearing in mind that not all States have as yet acceded to the Protocol, it becomes imperative to ensure universal applicability of the Protocol's prohibitions and their strict observance.

The Polish delegation wishes to propose, therefore, that the Eighteen-Nation Committee on Disarmament, in its report to the General Assembly, should underline the importance and significance of the report of the Secretary-General, recommending its further consideration particularly in the light of the guidelines contained in the Secretary-General's foreword where U Thant urges the Members of the United Nations:

"1. To renew the appeal to all States to accede to the Geneva Protocol of 1925;

2. To make a clear affirmation that the prohibition contained in the Geneva Protocol applies to the use in war of all chemical, bacteriological and biological agents (including tear gas and other harassing agents), which now exist or which may be developed in the future;

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3. To call upon all countries to reach agreement to halt the development, production and stockpiling of all chemical and bacteriological (biological) agents for the purposes of war and to achieve their effective elimination from the arsenals of weapons."

As in the past, Poland is ready to co-operate, both in this Committee, in the General Assembly and in other international organizations, with all States to ensure strict observance of the prohibition of use of chemical and bacteriological (biological) weapons and to make a sustained effort to achieve a complete elimination of those weapons from the armouries of States.